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PARIS FOR AFRICA WATCHERS

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SUBJECT: BRAZILIAN OIL WORKER KILLED IN CABINDA PROVINCE

Classified By: AMB DAN MOZENA FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D)

¶1. (SBU) Armed bandits shot and killed an oil industry medic, a Brazilian national, in the restive northern region of Cabinda Province on December 26th, 2007. The incident occurred when the Brazilian and a team of Angolan workers were stopped by a group of seven armed men as they traveled from an onshore concession area to their protected base camp.

The men ordered everyone from the vehicle and lit the vehicle on fire. At that point a second jeep in the convoy approached; the bandits apparently panicked and fled, shooting and killing the medic in the melee. What remains unclear is whether the medic was targeted as an expatriate and deliberately killed to send a message, or was accidentally shot by random fire.

¶2. (C) The motive behind the attack, which took place in an onshore exploration block owned by Angola oil parastatal Sonangol, also remains unclear. Sonangol security officials informed the Brazilian Embassy that the incident appears to be a criminal act of banditry rather than a political act by renegade FLEC (Cabinda Liberation Front) elements. There are reports that local residents have recently expressed frustration with the onshore exploration project, as it has yet to deliver on its promise to generate local employment opportunities. The attackers were reportedly young, male, and dressed in civilian attire. The FLEC has not claimed responsibility for the attack. NOTE: While the FLEC was technically disbanded by the August 2006 signing of a Memorandum of Peace and Understanding between the FLEC and GRA, rumors of sporadic FLEC activity in the province have persisted. END NOTE

¶3. (SBU) According to the Brazilian Embassy, the medic worked for Geotechnics, a Brazilian oil company sub-contracted by Houston-based Grant Geophysical to perform seismic testing. Grant Geophysical is currently conducting onshore exploration in the Cabinda North block in a joint venture with Sonangol. Other industry sources report that Grant and Sonangol have suspended operations in the block while the incident is investigated and security situation reviewed.

¶4. (SBU) COMMENT: The attack, the first oil industry expat killing since the MOU was signed, highlights the continuing hazards in doing onshore business in Cabinda. The Embassy will seek further clarification of whether the killing was the result of banditry or was politically motivated. Meanwhile, the Embassy will review this incident with American companies active in the province in the upcoming Overseas Security Advisory Council meeting and urge them to review their safety procedures. END COMMENT
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